

BOOK REVIEW

Butterflies of the Solomon Islands: systematics and biogeography. By John Tennent. Storm Entomological Publications, Dereham, UK; October 2002; xxiv + 413 pp; hardback. ISBN 0-9542045-0-6. Available from the author.

Until now, the butterfly fauna of the large and complex group of islands that form the Solomon Archipelago has been poorly studied and documented. This new book by John Tennent addresses that problem admirably, providing a worthy companion to recent volumes on the butterflies of Australia and Papua New Guinea by Braby and Parsons respectively.

An introductory section provides useful and often fascinating information on geological history, climate, vegetation, early visitors and collectors, mimicry, biogeography, distribution and endemism, conservation and eco-tourism. The hazards faced by early collectors are well illustrated by the account of Charles Woodford, the first Resident Commissioner of the Islands, who evidently lived in 'interesting times.'

The main body of the work is the systematic section. Detailed accounts cover the 346 species and subspecies now recorded from the Islands, placed in five family chapters (including Hesperidae). Much new information is included, particularly on habits and distribution. The Papilionidae chapter includes a detailed (and factual) account of the capture of the type and other specimens of *Ornithoptera victoriae*, a story entertaining enough without the fanciful embellishments of earlier accounts. An appendix to the systematic section provides full label data for all the specimens examined; in effect this is a useful database for Solomon Islands material and includes data from early as well as recent material. A gazetteer helps resolve the complex island nomenclature and a series of maps preceding the introduction helps locate them.

The butterflies themselves are superbly illustrated on 84 colour plates, including many taxa previously illustrated only in black and white (or not at all). All illustrations are life-size and those of *Ornithoptera victoriae* subspecies (6 plates) and *Chilasa toboroi* are particularly striking. The author has described many new taxa in recent years (including some in the *Australian Entomologist*), and it is a visual delight to see them assembled together in one place. Four additional colour plates illustrate habitats.

As the author notes, many new taxa undoubtedly await discovery, particularly in the under-explored mountainous interiors of many of the islands. By bringing together what is currently known, the present volume will undoubtedly act as a stimulus to further investigation. Identification of Solomon Islands material no longer presents almost insurmountable problems and the bibliography provides a detailed compendium of relevant literature. The book is well written and attractively presented. I have no doubt it will appeal to all those interested in butterflies (and natural history generally) in the southwestern Pacific.

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